Back to ‘battleground Britain’ for weekend’s weather

Description

Cold weather is set to continue this week, with temperatures getting progressively colder through to Friday when they are expected to drop as low as -10 °C in some places.

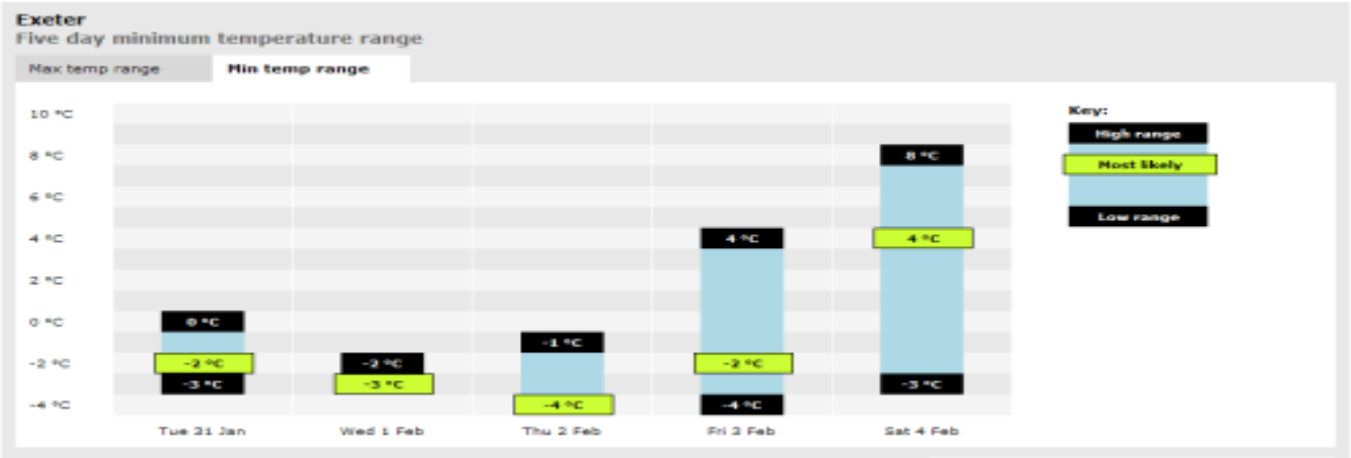
Despite the cold, snow is not a big feature in the forecast as the majority of the UK will see dry and bright conditions. There is a risk of some light and scattered snow showers in some eastern coastal areas on Wednesday and Thursday, but any accumulations will be light and patchy.

The reason for the cold weather is a high pressure sitting over Scandinavia, allowing cold air from eastern Europe to push in over the UK.

But, as we head into the weekend, this weather pattern is set to come under threat as a front of milder air and rain tries to push in from the Atlantic to the west.

Britain will be at the centre of a battle for supremacy between these two competing systems. It’s likely that the mild and wet Atlantic front will grind to a halt as it comes up against the blocking high sitting over Europe, but the uncertainty focuses on exactly where it will stop.

You can see this uncertainty in our forecast temperature range for the next few days, which shows the range of temperatures we could see. As we get to Saturday, the potential range increases significantly – as we could see cold conditions persist or milder conditions take over.



Either way, there is a risk that we may see some snow over the weekend as the rain in the Atlantic weather front collides with the cold air sitting over the country.

Due to the high amount of uncertainty, it’s difficult to give any detail at the moment – but we should have a clearer picture in the coming days. For the latest information, stay up to date with our latest forecasts and warnings.

Date Created
January 2012

Met Office in the Media: 29 January 2012

Description

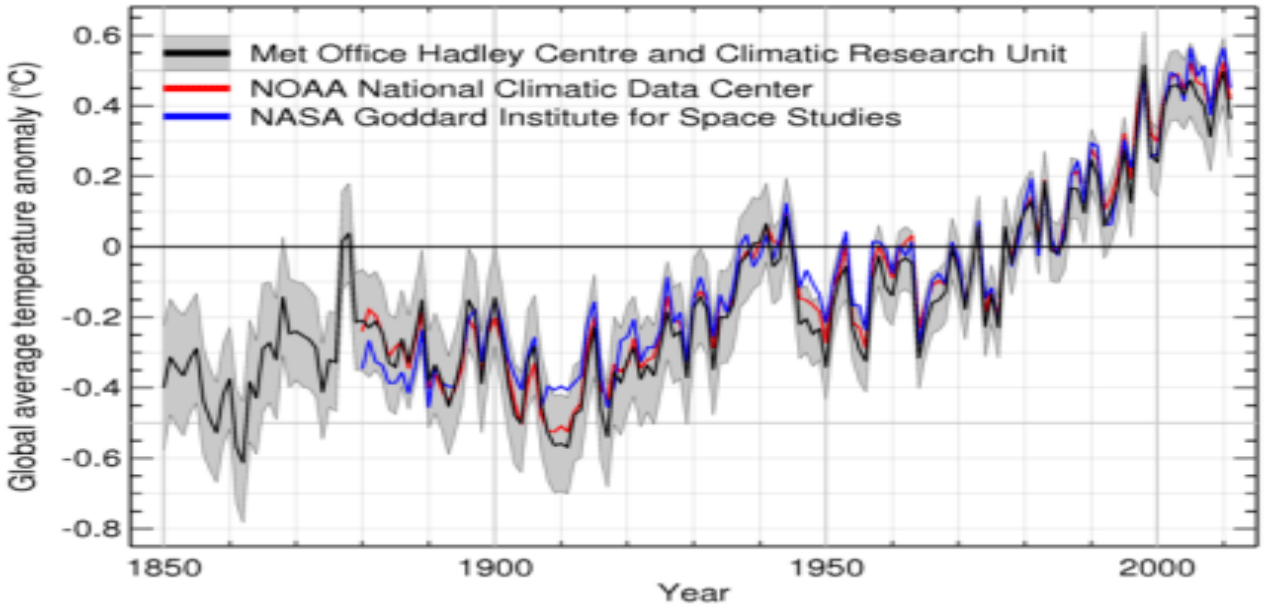
Today the Mail on Sunday published a story written by David Rose entitled “Forget global warming – it’s Cycle 25 we need to worry about”.

This article includes numerous errors in the reporting of published peer reviewed science undertaken by the Met Office Hadley Centre and for Mr. Rose to suggest that the latest global temperatures available show no warming in the last 15 years is entirely misleading.

Despite the Met Office having spoken to David Rose ahead of the publication of the story, he has chosen to not fully include the answers we gave him to questions around decadal projections produced by the Met Office or his belief that we have seen no warming since 1997.

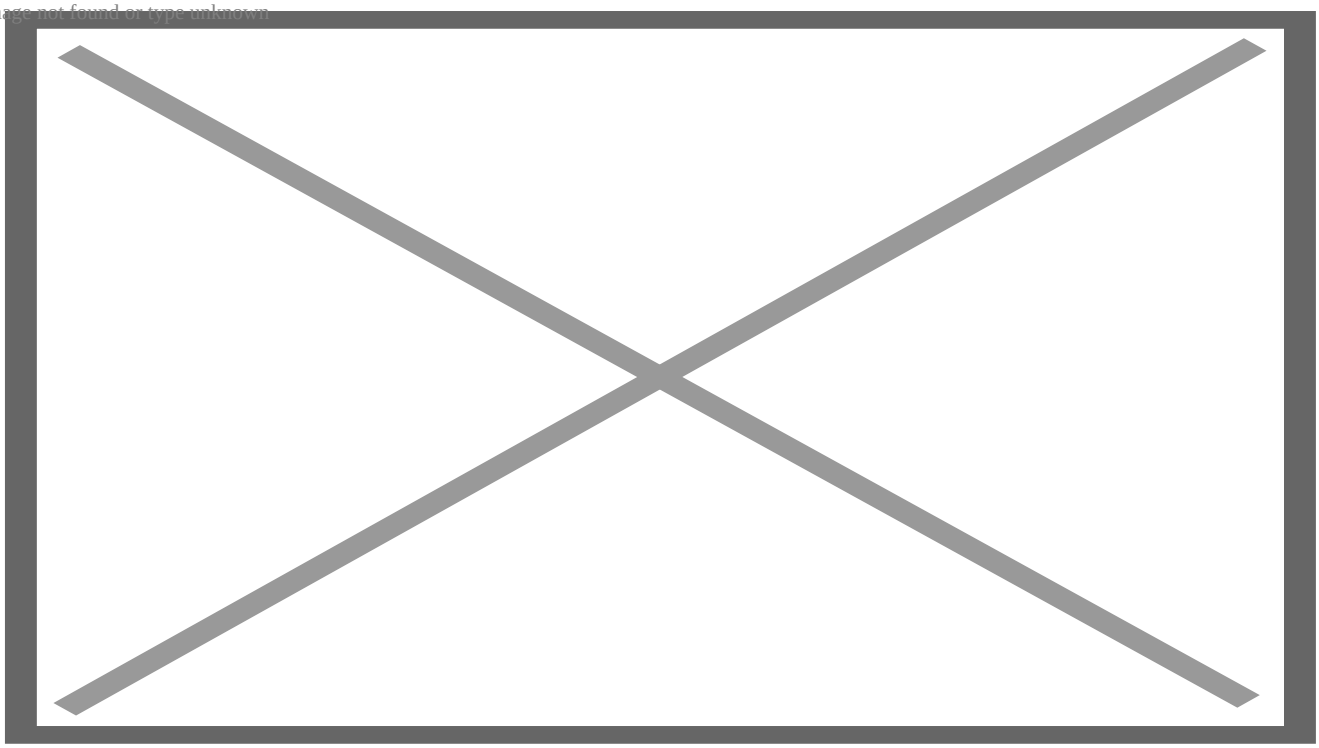
For clarity I have included our full response to David Rose below:A spokesman for the Met Office said:
“The ten year projection remains groundbreaking science. The complete period for the original projection is not over yet and these projections are regularly updated to take account of the most recent data.
“The projections are probabilistic in nature, and no individual forecast should be taken in isolation. Instead, several decades of data will be needed to assess the robustness of the projections.

“However, what is absolutely clear is that we have continued to see a trend of warming, with the decade of 2000-2009 being clearly the warmest in the instrumental record going back to 1850. Depending on which temperature records you use, 2010 was the warmest year on record for NOAA NCDC and NASA GISS, and the second warmest on record in HadCRUT3.”



Global average temperatures from 1850 to 2011 from the three individual global temperature datasets (Met Office/UEA HadCRUT3, NASA GISS and NOAA NCDC

Image not found or type unknown



Furthermore despite criticism of a paper published by the Met Office he chose not to ask us to respond to his misconceptions. The study in question, supported by many others, provides an insight into the sensitivity of our climate to changes in the output of the sun.

It confirmed that although solar output is likely to reduce over the next 90 years this will not substantially delay expected increases in global temperatures caused by greenhouse gases. The study found that the expected decrease in solar activity would only most likely cause a reduction in global

temperatures of 0.08 °C. This compares to an expected warming of about 2.5 °C over the same period due to greenhouse gases (according to the IPCC's B2 scenario for greenhouse gas emissions that does not involve efforts to mitigate emissions). In addition the study also showed that if solar output reduced below that seen in the Maunder Minimum – a period between 1645 and 1715 when solar activity was at its lowest observed level – the global temperature reduction would be 0.13C.

Date Created
January 2012

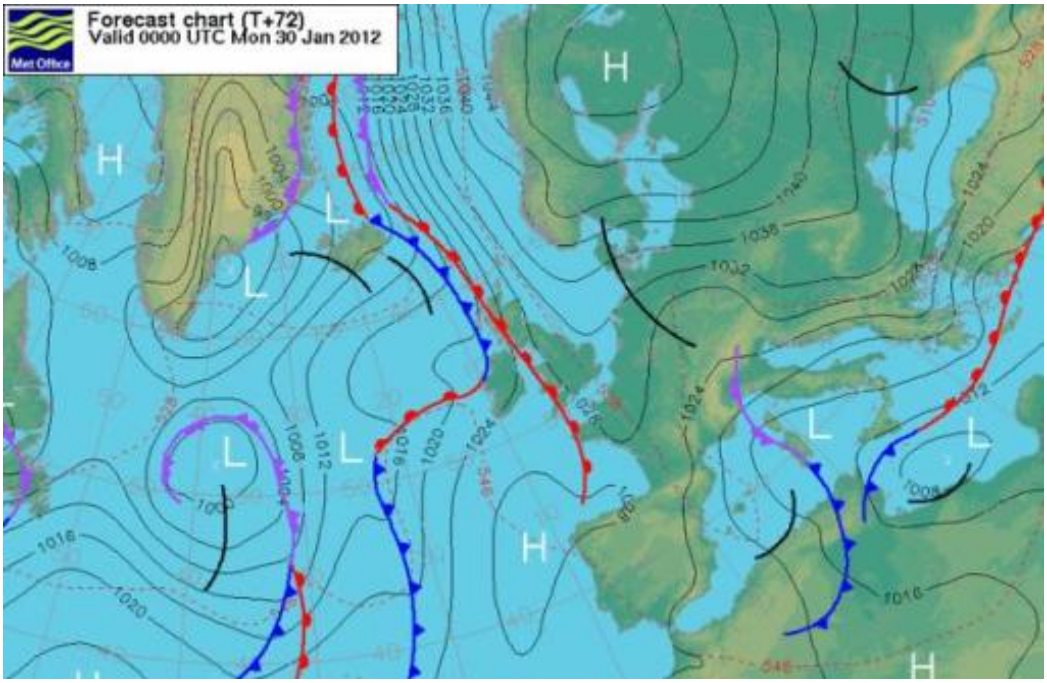
Cold weather brings risk of snow to the UK

Description

Colder weather will affect parts of the UK through this weekend and into next week as weather from the east wins the battle for dominance against milder conditions that have prevailed so far this winter.

Temperatures are likely to be below average this weekend and through next week. Although we have had short-lived cold snaps in December and earlier in January lasting 2 or 3 days, it would be fair to say that this period of cold weather is likely to be the most prolonged we have seen so far this winter.

At the moment we have a high pressure system over eastern Europe trying to push in cold air from the east, while milder Atlantic air is trying to push in from the west. The colder air is set to win over the next few days, bringing a risk of snow to western areas on Monday morning. Higher parts of Wales and north-western Britain are most at risk, although exactly where and how much snow there will be is still in the balance and you should stay in touch with the latest forecasts and warnings on our website.



Forecast pressure chart for 00:00GMT on Monday 30 January

Later on Monday the weather front weakens and moves back west, leaving drier conditions for the UK with a few wintry showers possible in the east at times.

As we go into February there is still considerable uncertainty in the forecast, although at the momentwe expect the cold weather to persist with occasional wintry showers near to the east coast and sharp overnight frosts. Although temperatures will be below average, it is not expected to be exceptionally cold. Alternatively by the middle of February we could see a return to milder and more unsettled conditions with showers or longer spells of rain.

With the colder conditions, the Met Office will be issuing Cold Weather Alerts as part of the Cold Weather Plan developed by the Department of Health, the Health Protection Agency and Age UK to help reduce the impact of cold weather on people's health this winter.

Age UK demonstrates just how valuable the Cold Weather Alert Service is to the more vulnerable sectors of the community. These alerts put everyone in a better position to respond to forecasts of severe weather, inform those who are most at risk from winter weather and what they can do to keep well.

For more info on the latest weather forecast you should go to the Met Office website.

Date Created
January 2012

Met Office in the Media: 26 January 2012

Description

Today sees the launch of the Government's **Climate Change Risk Assessment** (CCRA) highlighting the top 100 challenges faced by the UK from our changing climate. The research confirms the UK as a world-leader in understanding climate risk, ensuring the governemtn is well placed to make robust plans to deal with these threats. Coverage this morning includes the BBC report on the 'First report on UK climate impact' andthe Independent reporting on how the UK is 'told to prepare for mass floods in future'.

The Met Office contributed to the CCRA providing scientific guidance on the latest climate projections (UKCP09) and leading the risk assessment on the energy sector. In addition we also provided further research on urban heat islands and rainfall runoff. Utility Week have also covered the launch of the study, reporting on how 'Utilities face some of the heaviest threats from global warning, a comprehensive government study shows'.

Elsewhere there was widespread coverage about the launch of our new Met Office Android App as it made 'app of the day' on TechDigest. At the same time we also launched an update to our iPhone App. Bothof these were covered in the Guardian as well as on android authority and intomobile.

Date Created
January 2012

Cold weather winning the war of probabilities

Description

Late last week we put out a blog article about an unusual amount of uncertainty in the longer range forecast (for the start of February onwards) for the UK.

This is because the atmosphere is currently in a finely balanced state and, depending on which way it goes, this could lead to a continuation of milder weather or a switch to much colder conditions – with frosts, ice and snow possible.

It comes down to whether we'll continue to see the current pattern of westerly winds bringing in milder conditions from the Atlantic, or whether a high pressure system developing over Russia will extend towards the UK to bring in cold air on easterly winds.

The Met Office and forecast centres around the world have been studying this situation closely but the 50/50 split on which outcome is the most likely has persisted – until now.

It now looks as if the scenario for colder conditions is slightly more likely, but our forecasters stress that a lot of uncertainty remains and milder weather could return.

Looking at our current forecast for the end of next week, our guidance states: "…a general continuation of the cold weather type seems most likely, but it is by no means certain. There is a risk of snow, ice and sharp frosts, with easternmost parts being most prone. However we certainly cannot discount the possibility that mild west/southwesterly winds will return instead, bringing rain at times."

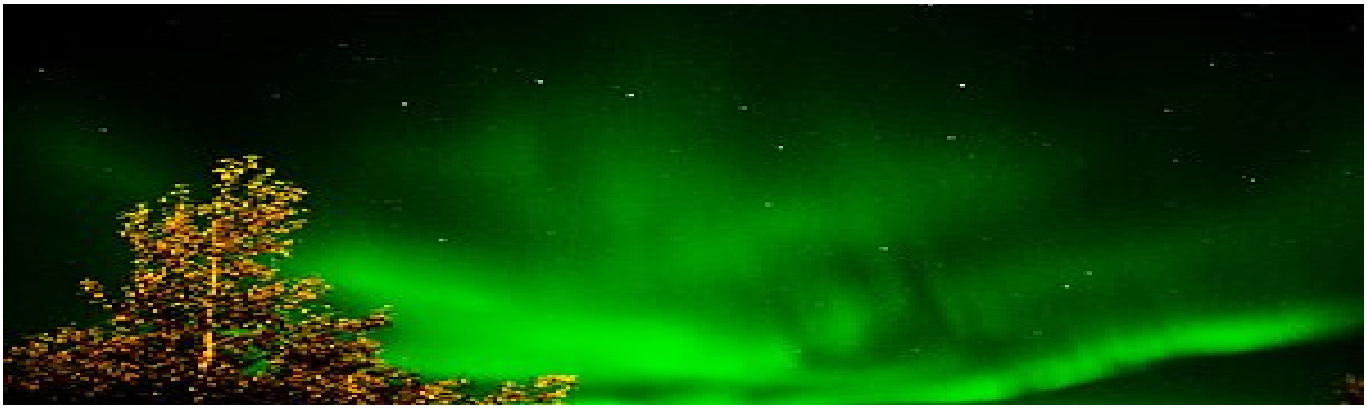
Looking further ahead, the forecast for mid-February onwards remains very uncertain too. Looking at our current guidance, it states: "…the most likely outcome is for much colder weather with winds mainly from an easterly quadrant to prevail, bringing widespread frosts, and snow to some areas. In this scenario it would be the east that would be most vulnerable to snowfall. There remains an alternative scenario, in which milder westerly winds prevail, the chances of this alternative scenario are currently rated as about one in three."

Our forecasters will continue to closely monitor the situation, so for the latest information check our weather forecasts and warnings about what to expect.

Date Created
January 2012

Northern Lights over the UK

Description



Guest blog: Sarah Reay, British Geological Survey

Many people in the UK were treated to a fine display of the northern lights (*aurora borealis*) on Sunday night. This was seen widely throughout Scotland and the north of England. There is a chance for further auroral displays tonight or tomorrow night if we are lucky.

The Northern Lights are a result of a geomagnetic storm. These storms are short-lived periods of high geomagnetic activity where the Earth's magnetic field changes very quickly and strong electric currents flow high in the atmosphere.

The geomagnetic storm is a consequence of activity on the surface of the Sun. Occasionally there are large explosions on the Sun, and huge amounts of charged particles are thrown out into space. These particles sometimes travel towards Earth where they are captured by the Earth's magnetic field and guided towards the geomagnetic polar regions. On their way down these particles are slowed down by Earth's atmosphere, which acts as a shield. These charged particles collide with gas molecules in the atmosphere. The energy released in these collisions is given off as light.

Geomagnetic storms follow the 11-year solar cycle. As we are heading towards the next solar maximum, due in 2013, the chance of big magnetic storms is on the increase. On average you might expect to see aurora in the far north of Scotland every few months, but less often as you travel further south.

To view the Northern Lights you are best finding a dark place away from street lights. You will need a cloud-free sky. In general, look to the north although it could be overhead or elsewhere. For your best chance of sighting an aurora, try to look during the hours around local midnight (22:00-02:00). However geomagnetic activity can happen at any time!

You can sign-up to receive alerts from the British Geological Survey when there is a chance for aurora activity. Unfortunately cloud is predicted for most of the UK tonight, but there is a much better chance for Wednesday night onwards. Keep an eye on the Met Office forecasts for the latest information.

* Many thanks to Sarah Reay of the British Geological Survey for the above guest blog. As a side note, people may be interested to know that solar storms can have other impacts on our planet – such as affecting telecommunication systems. The Met Office is developing a space weather forecasting system to give early warnings of events. As part of this, we are working in collaboration with the US's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to develop the service.

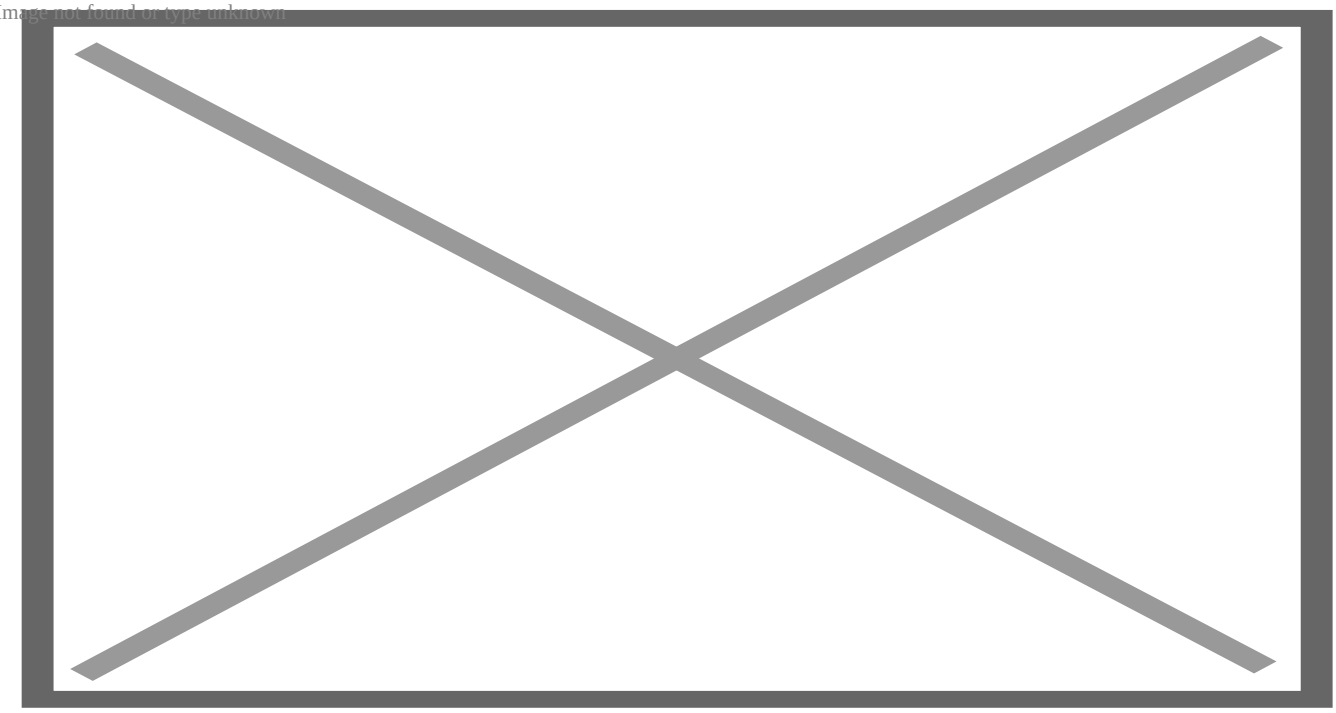
Date Created
January 2012

New Met Office Android app and updated iPhone app

Description

Following the success of the Met Office weather app on the iPhone, weather forecasts from the Met Office are now available for Android. The app can be used on all android phones and includes a widget so information can be accessed directly from the dashboard.

Image not found or type unknown



Key features of the new android app include:

• Free to download
• Up to date weather forecasts and warnings from the Met Office
• At a glance five day overview
• Three-hourly location forecasts
• 5000 locations to choose from with multiple favourites.

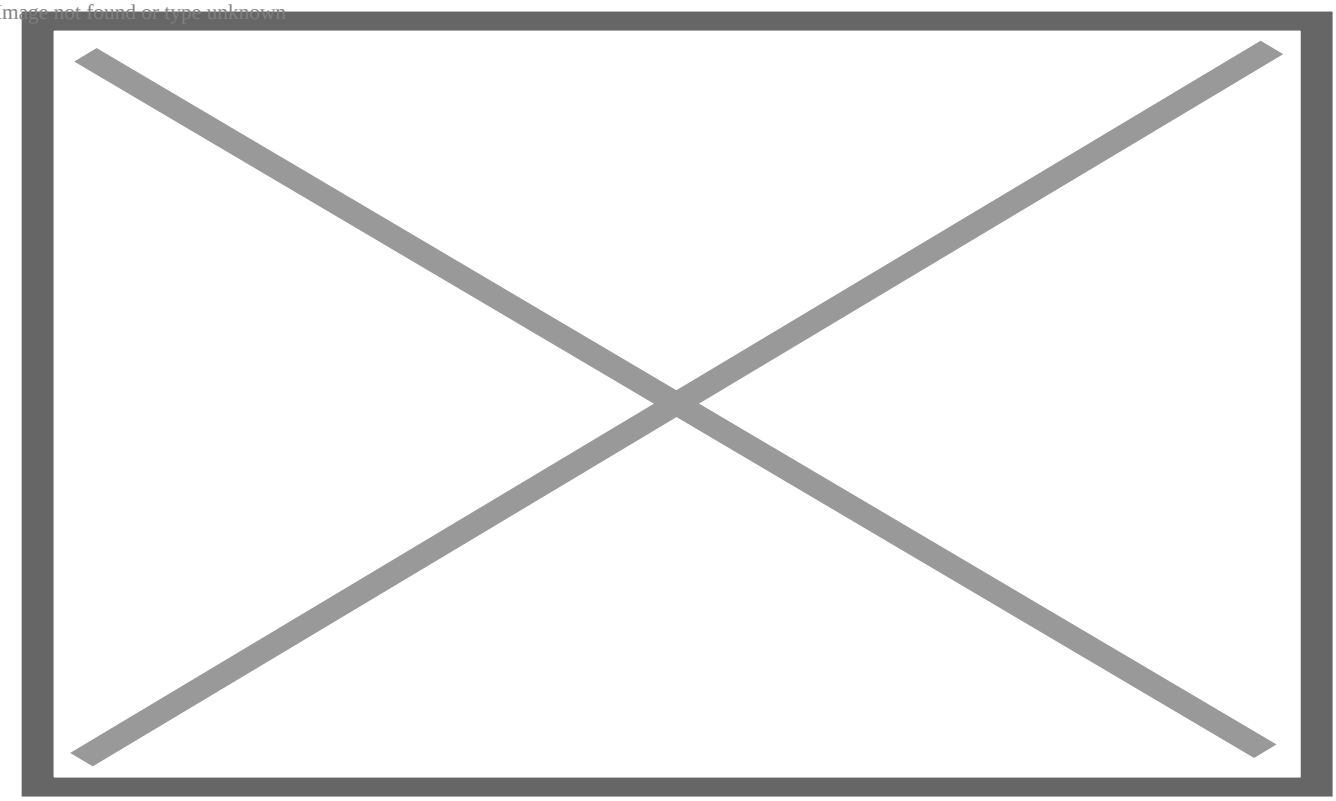
You can download the app from the Android Marketplace.

The Android app is the latest addition to our offering for mobile users, complementing our existing products; Mobile Weather for feature phone users, Smarter Weather for smartphone users and the iPhone app for iPhone users.

A new updated version of the Met Office iPhone app is also now available, taking into account the feedback we have received on the original version. New features include three-hourly

forecasts available up to five days ahead, UV forecast maps and information on the likelihood of rain or snow.

Image not found or type unknown



The iPhone app is available in the Apple App Store.

Date Created
January 2012

Met Office in the Media: 24 January 2012

Description

The **Daily Telegraph** has today published a correction relating to a story it published back in November of last year. In “Outlook fair for amateurs as Met Office releases data” the newspaper inaccurately suggested the Met Office had failed to predict the cold weather of last winter, the weather for the royal wedding and had been criticised by the Transport Select Committee.

The correction, printed on page 2 of the paper, and is reproduced below:

> *The Met Office*
>
> *Following “Outlook fair for amateurs as Met Office releases data” (Nov 27), we are happy to make clear that, as noted by the Select Committee for Transport, the Met Office did warn the public of last winter’s cold weather from early November 2010 and that it did accurately forecast the weather in London on the day of the Royal Wedding. While the Committee questioned the usefulness of Met Office seasonal predictions, it accepted the accuracy of its short-term forecasts.*

Following the publication of a scientific study on the effects of changes in **solar output on climate change** several papers reported on the findings that although solar output is likely to reduce over the next 90 years this will not substantially delay expected increases in global temperatures caused by greenhouse gases. The Daily Telegraph reported ‘Solar slump will not slow climate change’, whilst Reuters reported ‘Weaker sun will not delay global warming‘ and the Guardian said ‘Sun’s changes unlikely to slow global warming’.

Elsewhere there has been continued interest in the **changeable weather** affecting the UK at the moment. For the most up to date information check out our latest weather forecasts online.

Date Created
January 2012

Early results from our record-breaking weather game

Description

Last summer the Met Office launched an online game to understand how best to present probabilities in weather forecasts. Carried out in collaboration with the Universities of Bristol and Cambridge, the game was played more than 11,000 times making it a record-breaking research project.

The number of plays exceeded initial expectations and demonstrated the benefits of obtaining user feedback in this way. Thank you to all that took part and played the game – we could not have done this without your help.

The weather game received positive press coverage nationally and also from around the world after becoming the largest study on the understanding of probabilistic weather forecasts undertaken. The Washington Post reported on how game players were contributing to the science of communicating uncertainty in weather forecasting, whilst Digital River reviewed the game, reporting: “The efficacy of a well-designed ‘gamification’ strategy has been demonstrated brilliantly by the Met Office in this case.”

Analysis is still ongoing but results so far have shown some interesting findings. Key results include:

- When faced with straightforward decisions, providing probabilities doesn’t confuse people.
- For more complex situations, on average people are able to make better decisions using probabilities.
- People make the best decisions when more detailed information on forecast uncertainty is provided.

With such a large dataset these results only represent the tip of the iceberg. The data is still being analysed and the intention is for the full set of results to be published in peer reviewed journals. We will let you know when the articles are published and will make the underlying dataset available online. This could be of use for school or university projects – we would be interested in your findings. Thank you again for taking part.

Related articles

- A busy year for the Met Office in 2011 (metofficenews.wordpress.com)
- Communicating uncertain forecasts (metofficenews.wordpress.com)

Date Created
January 2012

Two stories for the start of February

Description

Anyone looking at our current 16-30 day UK forecast (for the first half of February) will have noticed that uncertainty is the theme – much more so than usual, even when looking this far ahead.

The outlook for this period is finely balanced, with two scenarios looking equally possible: the first being a continuation of the changeable and relatively mild conditions we've seen so far this winter; the second being a shift to a period of much colder weather.

Whilst two different outcomes are possible, it does look as though the general pattern that establishes itself by the start of February could last for quite a while, perhaps even until the middle of the month.

However, it is not possible to say which of the two scenarios is more likely due to an unusual amount of uncertainty in the forecast.

For these longer range outlooks, we use sophisticated techniques to understand the uncertainties – called ensemble forecasts.

In an ensemble forecast we run a forecast model many times from very slightly different starting conditions. The range of different outcomes gives us a measure of how confident or uncertain we should be in the overall forecast.

Currently the ensembles for the start of February onwards show a fairly even split that does not clearly favour either the mild or the cold option – and there are relatively few solutions in between.

There is a possible explanation for this relatively rare situation. In recent days there has been an increase in temperatures in the high atmosphere (the stratosphere) over the northern hemisphere. This change seems to have been driven in part by marked changes in the weather patterns lower down in the atmosphere – over the north Pacific for example.

Research, developed in part by the Met Office, suggests that changes such as this high up in our atmosphere can – in time – go on to affect weather patterns at surface-level. However, this is a new and very complex area of meteorology where we are still developing our understanding of all the mechanisms involved.

It is possible this is why we are seeing the volatility in the current forecast, as different model runs handle the interactions differently.

Rest assured, whatever happens we'll keep you up to date with the latest information through our forecasts and weather warnings – so as soon as we know, you'll know.

Date Created
January 2012

How mild has it been so far this winter?

Description

At the halfway point of January and winter as a whole, many people have been asking about what we've seen so far and how things are likely to end up in the records.

Looking at January, half-month figures show it has been a mild start to 2012 – with UK mean temperatures 2.1 °C above average.

This gives a mean (including night-time and day-time temperatures) of 5.5 °C, which – if it stayed the same – would place it as one of the warmer January's in climate records which go back to 1910.

However, we have to be very cautious about using half-monthly statistics as they don't really tell us much – things can change dramatically in the second half of a month so it is far too early to make any judgements.

December was a slightly milder than average month, but at just 0.6 °C above the UK long-term average for mean temperatures it wasn't that remarkable. If you combine those with the half month figures for January, the winter so far has been milder than average.

Like the half-monthly figures, however, it's far too early to say how this winter as a whole will fare in the records as (meteorologically speaking) we are only half way through – with the rest of January and all of February to go.

Traditionally these are the colder months of the winter, and with more changeable conditions in the forecast it's difficult to say how mild, cold or average this season may end up.

Looking in more detail at January's half-month statistics, other points of interest are that sunshine is slightly ahead of where we would expect – with the UK clocking up 68% of the usual sunshine for the whole month in the first 15 days.

The sunniest region has been England, with 75% of its average January sunshine hours so far. The least sunny region, Northern Ireland, has had 52% of its average for the month – about 'on schedule' at this point.

Rainfall has seen a more mixed picture, with England having just 37% of the average so far and Scotland being slightly ahead of schedule at 59%.

We will have to see how the second half of the month, and the season, affects the final figures before we can assess how the month and season place in the rankings.

Date Created
January 2012

Cloud spotting infographic and video

Description

Having trouble telling a cumulus from a stratus cloud? In our video James Chubb explains how clouds form and how this can help you can tell one cloud from another. We've also put together a guide to identifying all the different cloud types and how clouds form on the Met Office website.

To help with observing clouds we've created this infographic. Feel free to share and use on your own website or blog, you can get the embed code and a printable version from our cloud spotting page.

Met Office guide to cloud types and pronunciations

Image not found or type unknown

Source: metoffice.gov.uk

If you spot any interesting clouds, why not take a picture and add them to our Flickr clouds group.

Date Created
January 2012

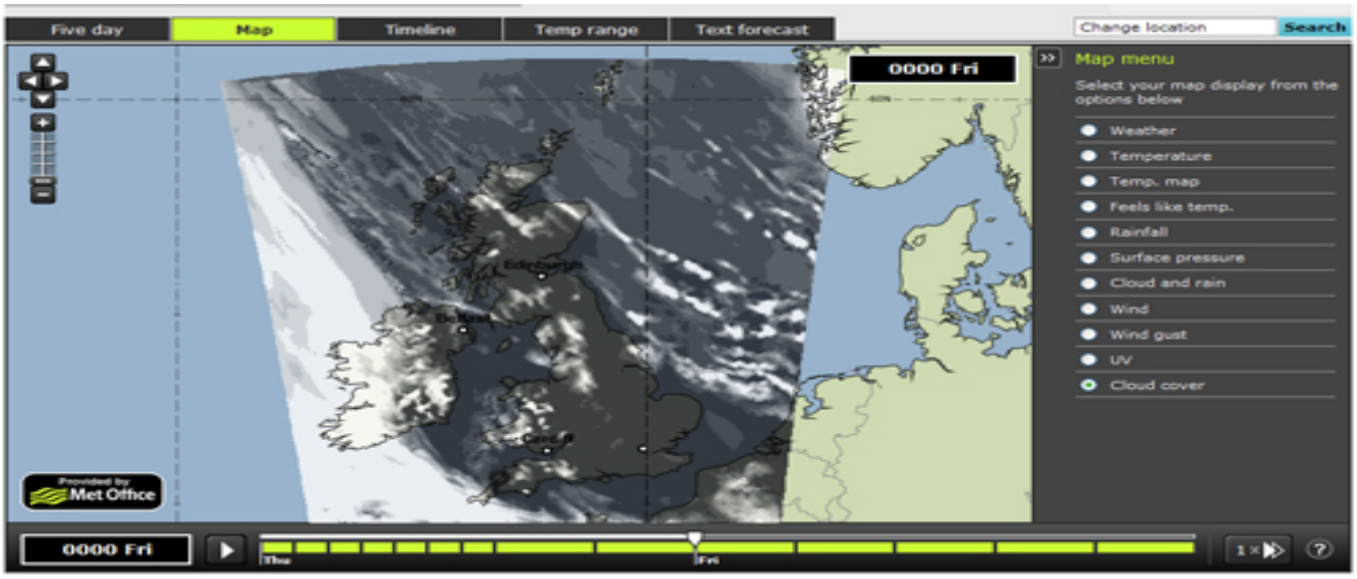
Clear skies forecast for Stargazing Live 2012

Description

Stargazing Live 2012 will see Dara Ó Briain and Professor Brian Cox presenting live from Jodrell Bank Observatory on the 16 – 18 January. There's also local Stargazing Live events taking place around the UK.

Astronomers will be hoping for clear skies for the event, and the forecast is looking promising. The majority of the country is set to be relatively cloud free over the weekend and through the early part of next week, although there is a risk of fog obscuring visibility in some areas. But with the clear skies comes a drop in temperature and night time temperatures may be as low as -6 °C for some.

If you're planning on heading to a local event, our new beta site maps allow you to view the forecast cloud cover for your area. Links to the forecasts for local stargazing locations are below.



UK cloud cover for midnight Friday 13

Stargazing Live Manchester. View Manchester forecast.

Stargazing Live Royal Observatory Edinburgh.View Edinburgh forecast.

Stargazing Live Hampstead Observatory. View Hampstead forecast.

Stargazing Live National Trust Gibside. View National Trust Gibside forecast.

Stargazing Live Eden Project. View Eden Project forecast.

Date Created
January 2012

Met Office in the Media: 12 January 2012

Description

There have been stories in the media today incorrectly suggesting that Met Office staff have been awarded “bonuses” for performance over the last year despite what has been reported as “dramatic mistakes” being made. This is simply not the case. Here, we provide a little more detail behind this story.

Firstly, in line with Civil Service reward principles, performance related pay is an integral part of the Met Office’s total reward structure. This is withheld pay which can only be earned in a given year by meeting key corporate, team and personal performance measures.

In 2010/11 the Met Office exceeded all of its business performance measures and targets, including measures on forecast accuracy and business profitability. This means that a greater proportion of the performance related pay budget was earned by staff in comparison to the previous year.

In terms of the corporate performance related pay, this translates to an additional £110 per person (a change of £765 in 2009/10 to £875 in 2010/11). The rest of the addition comes in the payment of team and personal performance related payments paid on individual or team performance.

In the last financial year, despite difficult economic conditions, we returned £8.2M (up from £4.5M in 2009/10) dividend back to MoD (and therefore back to the UK taxpayer). The Met Office has also grown its commercial revenue streams, increasing by £2.9M to £32.2M. Research has shown that for every £1 invested in the Met Office, we return £7.40 back to the UK economy – as well as saving numerous lives every year with our forecasts.

In addition, suggestions that we “got the weather dramatically wrong” or have made “dramatic mistakes” are totally incorrect.

The Met Office did not predict a mild winter last winter – we provided a long-range forecast to the Cabinet Office at the end of October highlighting the risk of a cold start to the winter. This forecast is used by government officials across the UK to support long-term planning. Our 30 day ahead forecasts on our website accurately highlighted the cold weather in late November and through December 2010.

Similarly we did not issue a forecast for the summer of 2010 or 2011 – we do not issue long-range forecasts to the public, as following research they have told us that they find forecasts for shorter timescales of more use. Therefore we offer forecasts for 6 to 15 days and 16 to 30 days ahead on our website.

In fact our forecasts are widely recognised as among the most accurate in the world – the World Meteorological Organization consistently ranks us in the top two operational forecasters in the world. Recent research showed that 84% of people trust advice from the Met Office, and 90% of people find

our Severe Weather Warnings useful.

Related articles

- Accuracy of Met Office forecasts
- Met Office case studies
- Met Office in the Media: ‘That sleighbell winter?’
- A busy year for the Met Office in 2011

Date Created
January 2012

Met Office in the Media: 09 January 2012

Description

The stormy conditions in Scotland last week were the source of much comment over the weekend. Scotland on Sunday explored this in 'Forecast is grim for the Met Office, but are they at fault for missing Big Gail?'. Unfortunately many of the points made in the article aren't entirely accurate.

Firstly, while the Met Office does have its headquarters in Exeter (not London), it also has a team of expert forecasters in Aberdeen who provide forecasts and warnings specifically for Scotland. They are supported by forecasters in Exeter as well as a team of weather advisers in Edinburgh. Together they provide information and guidance to support the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland and local councils across Scotland.

On the day of the storms in question, the Met Office had issued an 'Amber' Warning ahead of last Tuesdays storm and our Edinburgh advisers were working with Transport Scotland to help manage the impact of these strong winds.

The article also states the Met Office is part of the MoD, when we are in fact part of BIS. We receive no direct funding from government, but undertake our work for government based on securing specific contracts with government departments.

With regards to the statement that the Met Office is *'less accurate than a grandmother looking out of the window of her council flat'*, we're not quite sure which verification this is based on. Looking at things a bit more scientifically and factually, we regularly and openly verify our forecasts and these are shown to be accurate around 80% of the time. Also, according to the World Meteorological Organization, we are consistently ranked as one of the top two operational weather forecasting services in the world. However, if the grandmother in question is after a job, we're always keen to recruit new talent.

Date Created
January 2012

A busy year for the Met Office in 2011

Description

It has been another very busy year for us here at the Met Office as we have helped the UK manage the risks of severe weather, supported the world in the aftermath of natural disasters, continued our support of the UK economy and celebrated successes.

January

As the big freeze of December 2010 weakened its grip on the UK our forecasters focused on heavy rain and the risk of flooding in Cumbria in mid January. The Met Office, working with the Environment Agency, provided guidance and warnings of the severe weather and its impacts from the joint Flood Forecasting Centre based at the Met Office in Exeter.

February

The Met Office forecast the most likely track of Tropical Cyclone Yasi as it headed for Queensland in Australia, keeping the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other National Meteorological Services around in the world informed.

Our first award of the year was won by our Ocean Scientists who were awarded the Denny Medal for the best research paper of 2010 by the Journal of Operational Oceanography.

March

The Met Office used its global forecasting capability to support UK Government and relief charities in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami that devastated parts of Japan. Closer to home, the Met Office launched the Scotland Flood Forecasting Service in partnership with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. This is a new service providing emergency responders and the Scottish Government with the tools and forecasts to better prepare for and respond to floods.

We also launched improvements to the National Severe Weather Warning Service that brought clearer, more targeted warnings based on the likely impacts severe weather can bring.

April

High pressure dominated through the month bringing fine weather and warm temperatures. April 2011 became the warmest on record for the UK with temperatures some 3.7 °C above the average for the month.

By the end of the month the world's attention was focused on Westminster Abbey as HRH Prince William married Catherine Middleton. Our forecast of sunny spells and a 10% chance of a shower through the morning was spot on as the centre of London stayed dry for the wedding while showers ran to the north.

May

Toward the end of May the Met Office Volcanic Ash Advisory Centre (VAAC) was called into action as the Grimsvötn volcano on Iceland erupted. We provided forecast guidance to support decision-making by the Civil Aviation Authority and airline operators on whether aircraft can fly safely.

US President Barack Obama, on a visit to the UK, joined Prime Minister David Cameron to welcome the growing partnership between the Met Office and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) in working toward the delivery of space weather alerts.

June

June saw the launch of the Met Office Weather Observations Website. Supported by the Department for Education and the Royal Meteorological Society the website provides a platform for sharing current weather observations from across the world. After just six months more than 12.5 million observations had been submitted.

Late June saw the first Heat-Health alert of the summer as temperatures reached 33.1 deg C in Gravesend in Kent – the warmest summer day in over 5 years. This didn't last, however, as the summer was relatively cool with average temperatures of 13.7 deg C. This didn't stop key events from going ahead, with the Met Office providing accurate forecasts for the organisers of Wimbledon and The Open Championships.

July

In July we saw responsibility for the Met Office move to the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS). The move provides us with the opportunity to create, together with partners, a centre of excellence for scientific delivery in support of UK economic growth.

This month the Met Office became one of only a handful of organisations to achieve the prestigious Wildlife Trust Biodiversity Benchmark Award for protecting and promoting biodiversity.

August

The Met Office celebrated 150 years of forecasting for the nation on the 1st of August as it marked the anniversary of the first ever weather forecast appearing in print. This gave us, and the media, a chance to reflect on the huge progress made in meteorology and the Met Office's role as a pioneer at the forefront weather science.

September

A research project investigating how people respond to probabilities in weather forecasts became the largest of its kind ever carried out after thousands of people logged on to play an online game. This is part of our ongoing work to look at ways to help people make better use of our forecasts.

After tracking across the Atlantic, a post tropical storm that had formerly been Hurricane Katia arrived on UK shores bringing some very strong winds. This was the most powerful ex-hurricane to reach the UK since Hurricane Lili in 1996. Accurate forecasts from the Met Office and frequent updates on the

progress of the storm helped people in affected areas to prepare and stay safe.

October

The UK set a new record temperature for the month of October when Gravesend recorded 29.9 °C on the 1st October. This followed several days of exceptionally warm weather. Wales also secured a new October record when Hawarden reached 28.2 °C on the same day.

November

The Cold Weather Alert Service was launched to provide public alerts to help vulnerable groups keep well during winter. We also launched a number of products including a new route based forecast service for winter road maintenance that gives road operatives the opportunity to grit routes selectively and Weather Windows – designed to help airports manage resources around weather-related demands.

The Met Office also secured three awards. Our Atmospheric Dispersion Group won the Science, Engineering & Technology Award at the prestigious Civil Service Awards for their work during the volcanic eruptions and Japan nuclear incidents. Dr Adam Scaife, one of our leading scientists won the Lloyd's Science of Risk prize for research which has shed new light on how UV radiation from the Sun can influence weather over Europe. We also garnered the Best Use of Social Media award in the public sector at the Computer Weekly's Social Media Awards 2011.

December

December saw the publication of the results of a major new scientific assessment of climate change, highlighting the changes the world has already seen and the impacts it could face if global temperature changes are not limited. The assessment, commissioned by Chris Huhne – the UK's Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change – and led by the Met Office Hadley Centre, studied 24 different countries, to support policy decisions on climate change.

Date Created
January 2012

Met Office in the Media: ‘That sleighbell winter?’

Description

George Monbiot has written a fascinating comment piece in The Guardian exploring why some parts of the media reported that we were likely to have one of the coldest starts to winter again in 2011. In ‘That sleighbell winter?‘ George takes a look behind some of the ‘alternative sources’ used in these newspaper stories, the accuracy of their predictions and how they have not been challenged in the media, despite the relatively mild October, November and December that we actually saw in 2011.

This article follows a comment piece by our Chief Executive, John Hirst that appeared in The Times back in October calling for a ‘sense of reason’ relating to the number of alarmist stories that were appearing regularly in the media at the time that had the potential to confuse and even scare vulnerable people with no scientific basis. The Met Office’s job is to provide accurate and reliable information based on the most accurate forecasting information available and to inform the public and government agencies so that they can respond when it matters.

Date Created
January 2012

What's behind the stormy weather so far this winter?

Description

So far this winter the UK has seen some very strong winds associated with a series of Atlantic storms. This has included some near-record strength gusts of wind in places, with Scotland particularly badly affected.

On 8 December a gust of 165mph was recorded at Cairngorm Summit (1245m above sea level) during the first of the winter storms – that gust was just 8mph off the strongest ever recorded in the UK (set at the same spot in 1986). Even at low level there were strong winds, with 105mph at Tulloch Bridge in Highland.

Another powerful storm affected Scotland on 28 December, and today we saw another – this time notching up winds of around 100mph in parts of Scotland. The 102mph gust at Blackford Hill in Edinburgh is the third highest recorded at that station, and the strongest since 1998.

So has this winter been particularly stormy? We actually expect stormy weather in the UK at this time of year. In normal circumstances, low pressure systems develop over the Atlantic and track from west to east – eventually moving over the UK bringing strong winds and often heavy rain with them. This year we've seen nothing to disrupt that westerly flow, leading to the succession of low pressures systems we've seen so far.

While the general weather pattern is what we expect to see at this time of year, the strength of the storms and winds has been unusual. This is down to the jet stream – the high altitude winds which blow from west to east across the Atlantic and brings us our traditional changeable weather.

Over the past few weeks the jet stream has occasionally been particularly strong and some of the low pressure systems have interacted with that as they have tracked over the Atlantic, boosting their strength. This has led some of the lows to develop into powerful storms which have brought very strong winds to the UK.

The weather is set to remain changeable for the rest of this week, and beyond that it's not possible to say whether we will see any more particularly strong storms this winter. However, we'll continue to keep everyone up to date with the latest outlook in our forecasts and warnings.

Date Created
January 2012